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IMAGEM Detalhe de *Mulher segurando balança*  
do pintor holandês Johannes Vermeer, óleo sobre tela, data 1662 ou 1663.

## LUCRETIUS AND SPINOZA OR CLINAMEN AND CONATUS

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RESUMO: Este artigo compara e contrasta dois conceitos filosóficos provenientes de distintas linhagens de pensamento: de um lado, o *clinamen* de Lucrécio; do outro, o *conatus* de Espinosa. O que fomentou minha pesquisa foi uma conjugação dessas noções tal como proposta por Deleuze no apêndice de seu *Logique du sens*. Nesse sentido, a primeira seção está orientada tendo em vista uma elucidação da filosofia de Lucrécio – consequentemente, também a de Epicuro – e, especificamente, uma interpretação do desvio dos átomos ou *clinamen* em combinação com o tópico da liberdade. A segunda seção se dedica a clarificar a metafísica de Espinosa e a acomodação do tema da liberdade dentro de seu robusto enquadramento necessitarista, entrelaçado com o motivo do *conatus* ou esforço de auto-preservação. Contra a leitura de Deleuze, entretanto, argumentarei que *clinamen* e *conatus* pertencem a sistemas metafísicos que são praticamente incompatíveis e que corroboram um entendimento diferente sobre liberdade e necessidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Lucrécio, Espinosa, clinamen, conatus; liberdade, necessidade

## INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I juxtapose Lucretius' principle of *clinamen* and Spinoza's doctrine of *conatus*, with the aim of clarifying the interplay between freedom and necessity in the philosophy of each thinker. In brief, *clinamen* is the atomic swerve introduced by Epicurus into the materialist physics of Democritus and Leucippus and *conatus* is the striving to persevere in existence that Spinoza identifies with the actual essence of each being. I believe that by bringing these authors together – collating and contrasting the underlying assumptions that both *clinamen* and *conatus* entail – we might gain further insight on the distinctiveness of some features of their theory, just as chemical reagents, when placed together, allow for the observer to examine, discriminate and understand the specificity of each substance at issue in the experiment.

First of all, it should be noted that an approach to Lucretius – the Roman poet and intellectual of Epicurean inspiration from the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. – and Spinoza – the rationalist philosopher of Jewish-Dutch origin from the 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D. – could have explored equally legitimate and fruitful routes other than the one that I am proposing. On the one hand, one could have investigated their philosophical affinities, such as their shared commitment to a form of rationalism *cum* naturalism, the objection to teleology as an explanatory grid of the way of the world, or the criticism against prevailing religious beliefs and superstitious practices.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, one could have stressed their contrast, such as

1 As in Morfino's study, for instance, which pursues the red thread that connects Lucretius and Spinoza: "Fear and superstition are the common enemies of Lucretius and Spinoza. Against them both pleaded the cause of the knowledge of nature based on two fundamental points: the rejection of every finalist model of explanation of

Lucretius' atomistic dualism – atoms and void; primordial elements and empty space – and Spinoza's substance monism – *Deus, sive substantia constans infinitis attributis* (cf. SPINOZA, 1985, iP11<sup>2</sup>) – their irreconcilable views on the divine – transcendent and apathetic gods, on Lucretius' case, God as the immanent cause of all things, on Spinoza's – or still the very form of their work – a philosophical poem as *De Rerum Natura* following the trail of Parmenides, Xenophanes and Empedocles, contrary to the geometrical method from the *Ethics* echoing Euclid's *Elements*.

An incidental remark made by Deleuze in the first appendix to his *Logique du sens* brought my attention to the relation between the slight deviation from the trajectory of the atom or *clinamen* and the striving to preserve in existence or *conatus*. When explaining the workings of the *clinamen*, Deleuze conflates it with the Spinozian *conatus*. In brief, he argues that the *clinamen* is “a kind of *conatus*”<sup>3</sup>; this correspondence was later explored by other authors. The analogy motivated my research for this paper. *Pace* Deleuze, however, I argue that *clinamen* and *conatus* stand in an almost diametric position and support conflicting philosophical views.

natural phenomena and the affirmation of the existence of natural laws that regulate becoming.” (MORFINO, 2014, p.75). I will say more on Morfino's interpretation later on.

2 For the works of Spinoza, I have consulted the two-volume edition of *The Collected Writings of Spinoza* translated by Edwin Curley. For the Latin text I have consulted Bruder's edition (1843), the *Benedicti de Spinoza Opera quae supersunt omnia*.

3 The full passage reads as follows: “The *clinamen* or swerve has nothing to do with an oblique movement which would come accidentally to modify a vertical fall. It has always been present: it is not a secondary movement, nor a secondary determination of the movement, which would be produced at any time, at any place. The *clinamen* is the original determination of the direction of the movement of the atom. It is a kind of *conatus* — a differential matter and, by the same token, a differential of thought, based on the method of exhaustion” (DELEUZE, 1990, p.269).

The conflation between *clinamen* and *conatus* was later followed by Laurent Bove (cf. BOVE, 1994) and Warren Montag (cf. MONTAG, 2016). *Contra* Montag, I do not believe that this conceptual analogy that Deleuze carves out “is at least as illuminating for Spinoza as for Lucretius” (MONTAG, 2016, p.170). In fact, I believe that it is exactly the opposite. Putting these concepts together obfuscate our comprehension of the specificity that each of them brings, as well as the function that each performs within their respective philosophical system. Perhaps Nietzsche is right, sometimes mediating between two thinkers, equalizing their thoughts, may prevent— rather than illuminate — the appreciation of the singularity that each philosophy embodies (NIETZSCHE, 1974, p.212).<sup>4</sup>

I am well aware that these particular concepts associated with each thinker (*clinamen* with Epicurus/Lucretius; *conatus* with Spinoza) have sparked a wide-ranging, highly controversial academic debate over time. Nevertheless, I consider that in making this contradistinction, some fresh light may be shed on the purport and implications of each theoretical notion.

With that said, I start off the first section of the paper by delineating the framework of Epicurean philosophy to which the notion of the *clinamen* belongs. Then, I provide an exegesis of the verses from *De Rerum Natura* which contains an explanation of the motion of the swerve. I demonstrate that, in spite of the variety of conflicting readings of the swerve and the *libera voluntas*, it is possible to grasp a common denominator: a break in the chains of necessity, with an affirmation of

4 Certainly, Nietzsche employs much harsher words than my paraphrase of his aphorism reveals.

some sort of agency against the menace of fatalism.

In the second section, I move to Spinoza and elaborate on his *conatus* doctrine within the structure of his metaphysics. I begin by expounding on his criticisms against predominant ideas of “freedom” and then examine the relationship between *conatus*, necessity, and some expression of “free” action amidst Spinoza’s robust necessitarianism.

In the end, I show that Lucretius and Spinoza set up the problem of freedom and necessity in entirely different theoretical frameworks, such that *clinamen* and *conatus* are deeply geared into the metaphysical apparatus of each author. In this respect, I conclude that *clinamen* and *conatus* come forth almost to the point of incommensurability to one another.

#### EPICURUS AND LUCRETIUS: ON *CLINAMEN*, *LIBERA VOLUNTAS* AND AGENCY

In the Epicurean school, the *clinamen* is conceived as a physical rationale to defend a space for human agency where moral accountability, rational deliberation and justified praise and blame made sense. Accordingly, it seeks to establish a firm foothold against the risk of fatalism that a deterministic or even necessitarian metaphysical framework could generate. Throughout the paper, I consider fatalism as a subjective attitude of indifference or torpidity that is the outcome of a determinist or necessitarian metaphysical picture of the world. Whereas *determinism* claims that given certain antecedent conditions, a set of subsequent conditions will necessarily follow, while maintaining, at the same time, that the antecedent conditions are not a necessary truth, *necessitarianism* is a much stronger thesis given that it maintains that all truths are nec-

essary truths, so that the actual chain of causes is logically necessary (the antecedents as well as the consequences), to the point that an alternative series of events is, in principle, impossible.

With that said, an analysis of the theory of *clinamen* (παρέγκλισις) must at first confront the fact that we do not find any mention of it in Epicurus' extant writings. Nonetheless, references from different sources attribute to him the hypothesis of the swerve as an innovative feature appended to his atomist doctrine. It is usually thought that the swerve is a novelty that Epicurus introduces to eschew the deterministic implication that Democritus' physics might bring about. This is the account that one encounters both in the Epicurean Diogenes of Oenoanda (c. 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.) and in the work of an author mostly critical to Epicureanism such as Cicero (106–43 B.C.).<sup>5</sup> Lucretius' argument for the existence of the swerve in Book II from *De Rerum Natura* is another chapter in this story; indeed, a very important one, for it presents the most extensive and elaborate account of the swerve of atoms.

Thus, it is written in one of the surviving inscriptions from Diogenes of Oenoanda:

Once prophecy is eliminated, how can there be any other evidence for fate? For if someone uses Democritus' account, saying that because of their collisions with each other atoms have no free movement and that as a result it appears that all motions are necessitated, we will reply to him: 'Don't you know, whoever you are, that there is also a free movement in atoms [ελευθεραν τινά εν ταῖς ἀτόμοις κείνησιν], which Democritus failed to discover but Epicurus brought to light, a swerving movement, as he dem-

5 Further references to the *clinamen* and Epicurus are found in Plotinus, *Enneads* III.1, I, 14–29; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 1015 C, 1045 B–C, 1050 B–C 9, among others.



onstrates from evident facts?’ But the chief point is this: if fate is believed in, that is the end of all censure and admonition and even the wicked (fr. 32, I.14–3.14; LONG and SEDLEY, 1987, vol. I, p.106, 20G).<sup>6</sup>

In turn, in Cicero’s *De Fato* one reads:

(21) At this initial stage, if I were disposed to agree with Epicurus and to deny that every proposition is either true or false, I would rather accept that blow than allow that all things happen through fate. For the former view is at least arguable, whereas the latter is truly intolerable. Chrysippus, then, strains every nerve to persuade us that every *axioma* (proposition) is either true or false. For just as Epicurus is afraid that if he admits this he will have to admit that all events happen through fate – for if one of the two has been true from all eternity it is certain and if certain then necessary too, which he considers enough to prove both necessity and fate – so too Chrysippus fears that if he fails to secure the result that every proposition is either true or false he cannot maintain that everything happens through fate and from eternal causes of future events. (22) But Epicurus thinks that the necessity of fate is avoided by the swerve of atoms [*declinatione atomi*] ... (23) Epicurus’ reason for introducing this theory was his fear that, if the atom’s motion was always the result of natural and necessary weight, we would have no freedom [*nihil liberum nobis esset*], since the mind would be moved in whatever way it was compelled by the motion of atoms. Democritus, the originator of atoms, preferred to accept this consequence that everything happens through necessity than to rob the atomic bodies of their natural motions (*De Fato*, 21–3; LONG and SEDLEY, 1987, vol. I, pp.104–5, 20E).<sup>7</sup>

6 All references from classical texts were extracted from the collection *The Hellenistic Philosophers* organized by Long and Sedley. In this case, I offer the original source of the quote, together with the text number, and subsection from their volume, as follows: “[original reference]; LONG and SEDLEY, 1987, volume, page, <text number with subsection>.”

7 As I will have the opportunity to indicate below, Diogenes of Oenoanda’s citation presents us with an instance of causal determinism while Cicero’s gives us a case

Without explicitly mentioning the swerve of the atoms, it is possible to locate in Epicurus' philosophy this strong contention against the realm of fate and the rule of necessity as an overpowering force governing all events in human life. In a passage from the *Letter to Menoeceus* (133-4; LONG and SEDLEY, 1987, vol.1, p.102, 20A), Epicurus claims that it would be better to believe in the traditional mythology about the gods than to believe in the authority of fate from the "natural philosophers" [τὼν φησικῶν]. For regarding the former, at least there is a hope of turning the gods to one's favor by means of offerings and worship, while with the latter not even this alternative is granted, as one becomes a "slave of fate"<sup>8</sup> [εἰμαρμένη δουλεύει].

For this reason, Epicurus differentiated between (i) things that happen according to necessity [κατ' ἀνάγκην]; (ii) things that happen by chance [ἀπὸ τύχης]; and (iii) things that depend on us [παρ' ἡμᾶς] to happen. *In nuce*, necessity is the sphere of the inexorable, thus beyond our control (e.g., a hereditary disease or a past event<sup>9</sup>). Chance is the sphere of the unpredictable, thus extremely complicated to control (e.g., a lightning bolt that suddenly strikes the mast of a ship). Finally, what depends on us is the sphere where human agency intervenes and rational deliberation is called for.

of logical determinism.

8 Furlley argues that in this criticism Epicurus has in mind successors of the atomist school of Democritus such as Nausiphantes. (cf. FURLEY, 1967, pp.174-5). It is against the determinist upshots of atomist's physics, as well as the absolute govern of fate from the Stoics, that the theory of *clinamen* appears to have been carved out.

9 As Aristotle argued, and Epicurus seems to have taken into account, it is impossible to rationally deliberate and take a stand in what is absolutely necessary, such as mathematical truths, past events, and the celestial motion of the superlunary bodies.

Epicurus was concerned in affirming this separation and safeguarding a domain where human action and rational deliberation made sense, instead of handing over to the realm of necessity or even chance the entirety of events that occur in human life. Besides orthodox atomism, it is a standpoint predominant in the School of the Stoics that he was challenging directly. As an illustration, Zeno and Chrysippus are said to have compared the working of fate with the image of a dog tied to a moving cart: whether willingly or unwillingly (*volens, nolens*), the dog would necessarily go after the cart.<sup>10</sup> Beyond philosophical quarrels, this kind of perception also permeated certain aspects of Greek spirituality more broadly. One need only to recall Cassandra predicting the Fall of Troy and Oedipus fulfilling the prophecy from the Oracle of Delphi as he most resolutely strived to escape it.

We need to distinguish, however, between two types of necessity that Epicurus is grappling with. The *clinamen* will turn out to be a form of answering to the empire of necessity and its embodiment in a fatalist attitude. On the one side, there is *causal determinism* as a *theory about physical causation* which claims that every event is exhaustively necessitated by antecedent conditions that provide necessary and sufficient causes for it occurring the way it does and not otherwise. We are familiar with this kind of causal determinism through the divine, all-comprehensive Stoic *Lógos* that governs the world like a providential plan of interconnected causal events and through Newtonian physics with its natural

10 “When a dog is tied to a cart, if it wants to follow it is pulled and follows, making its spontaneous act coincide with necessity, but if it does not want to follow it will be compelled in any case. So it is with men too: even if they do not want to, they will be compelled in any case to follow what is destined.” (HIPPOLYTUS, *Refutation of all heresies* I.21; LONG and SEDLEY, 1987, vol.2, p.382, 62A)

laws giving way to an intransigent mechanical causal chain.<sup>11</sup> Basically, we have the world apprehended as the manifestation of a divine design or the output of a mechanical machine. In both cases, each event that takes place is necessitated by a precedent efficient cause, which in turn will be the cause of some further event, with this overdetermined causal networks stretching back to the Divine Mind and its *Lógos* or to the Natural Law and its *Nómos*.

On the other side, there is *logical determinism* as a *theory about logical consequence*. It is associated with the principle of bivalence when applied to statement about the future, that is, the claim that the only logically valid truth-value assigned to a proposition is (a) necessarily true or (b) necessarily false, while maintaining that this also holds for statements about the future.<sup>12</sup> This was an important principle in Stoic logic and the Megarian/Dialectical School of the logician Diodorus Cronus also took it into account in the earliest development of modal logic in Antiquity (cf. SEDLEY, 1977). In a cultural setting in which oracles and omens had an established place and status, it is at least understandable why this form of logical analysis of propositions has risen.

11 Chrysippus asserted that fate is “a certain everlasting ordering of the whole: one set of things follows on and succeeds another and the interconnexion is inviolable.” (AULUS GELLIUS, *Noctus Atticae*, 7.2.3; LONG and SEDLEY, 1987, vol. I, p. 297, 50K.). For a well-argued, methodical account of fate and freedom within the Stoic School, see O’Keefe, 2017.

12 As reported by Cicero: “Chrysippus uses the following argument: if there is motion without a cause, not every proposition (what the dialecticians call *axioma*) will be either true or false, since anything lacking efficient causes will be neither true nor false. But every proposition is either true or false. Therefore, there is no motion without a cause. If this is so, everything that happens, happens through antecedent causes – in which case, everything happens through fate. The result is that everything happens through fate. (CICERO, *On fate*, 20–1; LONG and SEDLEY, 1987, vol. I, p. 233, 38G).

Given this, I would claim that causal determinism presents us with a problem of *overdetermination* (everything is determined due to a complex causal chain that renders every event the necessary outcome of precedent events) and that logical determinism presents us with a problem of *predetermination* (everything is determined because propositions about the future must be necessarily true or necessarily false; as if the future was necessarily fixed). Despite the distinction we have drawn, it is important to recognize that both forms of determinism are intermingled for Epicurus and the Stoics, as they seem to be reciprocally entailing.

Epicurus rejects the absolute rule of determinism.<sup>13</sup> For one, in an overly deterministic mechanical system or an already predetermined divine economy, there would be no justification for moral accountability, i.e., no reason to praise virtuous deeds and blame vicious misdeeds. Moreover, an overriding empire of necessity could eventually render action meaningless with the threat of “actionlessness” (*apraxia*), as the ‘lazy’ or ‘idle’ argument portrays.<sup>14</sup> Epicurus claims that it would be

13 “Epicurus saw the threat of universal necessitation not only in unbreakable chains of physical causation, but also in the logical principle of bivalence according to which every proposition is either true or false, including those about the future... But Epicurus, like the Stoic with whom he is contrasted ... saw physical and logical determinism as two aspects of a single thesis. The two formulations of determinism tend to be treated as interchangeable, as do the two respective solutions, the swerve and the denial of bivalence ... This conflation seems to rest on the assumed equivalence of ‘true in advance’ with ‘determined by pre-existing causes’” (LONG and SEDLEY, 1987, vol. I, p. III-2).

14 Cicero’s example is very instructive. Suppose somebody is fated to recover from a given disease. If this is the case which has already been established by fate, why bother calling the doctor, and taking the proper medicine to get healed? Likewise, if it has already been fated that somebody will die from a disease, what would motivate his action to try to overcome it? If so, then it is equally futile to call a doctor and take the

unacceptable also on “pragmatic grounds” for someone to hold the belief that everything occurs by the force of necessity and consistently act based upon this belief. This is the line of argument that the surviving fragments from what has been established as book 25 from his major work *On Nature* offer us (cf. SEDLEY, 1983; SEDLEY, 1988; O’KEEFE, 2005, p.131-4).

For these reasons, Epicurus has been hailed for having discovered the freedom of the will, with the swerve of the atoms being closely connected with it (cf. HUBY, 1967). In Sedley and Long, we also find this strand of reading: “Thus posing the problem of determinism he becomes arguably the first philosopher to recognize the philosophical centrality of what we know as the Free Will Question.” (LONG and SEDLEY, 1987, vol.1, p.107). In consonance with this, the swerve is traditionally construed as introducing a minimum degree of physical indeterminism that hinders volitions of becoming fully explicable in terms of the laws of physics and the causal network of atoms. In a well-known piece, Sedley draws a parallel between Epicurus’ reworked atomism and Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle, taking the *clinamen* to stand for the element of indeterminacy which occurs in a subatomic level as demonstrated by modern quantum physics (cf. SEDLEY, 1983, p.12). Anticipating the comparison a bit, one can see that this alone would immediately clash with

medication. As Cicero declares, if we accept this fatalist argument that everything is already decided and inescapably determined from eternity, then “we would do nothing whatever in life” (CICERO, *On fate*, 28-30; LONG and SEDLEY, 1987, vol. I, p.339, 558). The Stoics had a clever approach to deflect the lazy argument by claiming that certain events are “co-fated.” In this respect, God would have fated the consequent result as well as my causally effective antecedent action. In the example under consideration, both the activity of calling the doctor, and ingesting the medicine, as well as the aftermath of recovering health would be “co-fated.” See O’KEEFE, 2017.

Spinoza's metaphysics in the *Ethics*, for "a thing which has been determined by God to produce an effect, cannot render itself undetermined" (cf. SPINOZA, 1996, p.19, IP27, conjoined with A3).

Naturally, this interpretation of the *clinamen* is far from being unanimous. There has been much debate on both the "discovery" of the free-will problem in Antiquity<sup>15</sup> and on the role that the swerve should perform to ensure that agency is preserved.<sup>16</sup> In what follows, I will turn my attention to Lucretius' text and I will attempt to bring together the divergent interpretation of the *clinamen* in an integrated and general direction.

It is in Book II of *De Rerum Natura* that Lucretius exposes the theory of *clinamen*. In a first argument (216-50), he advances the cosmogonic function of the swerve to justify the collision of atoms and, consequently, the composition of the world. It has been argued that the swerve as the third sort of motion – besides the motion due to *pondus* (or weight) and *plagae* (or blows) that comes out of the shock between atoms – was an attempt that Epicurus undertook to evade Aristotle's criticism of Democritus' atomist doctrine (cf. FOWLER, 2002, p.118-20). In a second section (251-93), the *clinamen* plays a role in psychology, as it endeavors to explicate somehow why animated beings can act voluntarily. According to Fowler, the cosmological and the psychological domains in which the swerve operates are intertwined, for "Both explain how change enters a universe which would otherwise be changeless" (FOWLER, 2002, p.307).

15 For instance: BOBZIEN, 1998; BOBZIEN 2000; O'KEEFE, 2005; FREDE, 2011.

16 See GULLEY, 2010; FOWLER, 1983; FOWLER, 2002; ENGLERT, 1987; FURLEY, 1967; AVOTINS, 1980; SAUNDERS, 1984.

In the light of Fowler's reconstruction of the argument, the *clinamen* is presupposed at the atomic level as a physical rationale for the macroscopic phenomenon of the *libera voluntas* that is apparent in the self-initiating action of animated creatures. As Lucretius famously wrote: "Nothing can come into being out of nothing" [II.287; LONG and SEDLEY, 1987, vol.1, p.106, 20F]. Therefore, as *voluntas* manifestly exist and as the volitional aptitude that drives humans in one direction or the other cannot be fully explicated *vis-à-vis* the 'internal necessity' of the weight that drags the atoms downwards or the external force of collision that throws them around, there has to be a self-propelling movement at the microscopic-atomic level that accounts for *libera voluntas*. This atomic motion is the *clinamen*.

As it has already been observed, the general form of the argument is the oft-employed Modus Tollendo Tollens (If p, then q; but not q; therefore, not p) that Lucretius relies on heavily in the first two books and which is also relevant for Epicurus' reasoning. In this case: (p1) If there is no *clinamen*, there would be no *libera voluntas*; (p2) But there is *libera voluntas*; (Conclusion) Therefore, the *clinamen* must exist.<sup>17</sup> The argument moves from the perceptible domain where *voluntas* can be seen as a principle of motion to the atomic level where the swerve is taken to be a source of movement as well. As Sedley nicely puts it: "The existence of psychological autonomy is his premises, the existence of the swerve his conclusion." (SEDDLEY, 1983, p.14). The *voluntas*, in this instance, is a form of intentional power that allows agents to initiate motion and thus become causally effective in the world in the pursuit of their desires.

17 A reconstitution drawn from (O'Keefe, 2005, p.28-9) and (Fowler, 2002, p.323).



So, let us take a look at what the text from *De Rerum Natura* states:

Moreover, if all motion is always linked and new motion arises out of old in a fixed order and atoms do not by swerving make some beginning motion to break the decrees of fate, so that cause should not follow cause from infinity [*ex infinito*], from where does this free volition [*libera...*] exist for animals throughout the world? From where, I ask, comes this volition wrested away from the fates [*fatis a volsa voluntas*], through which we proceed wherever each of us is led by his pleasure and likewise swerve off [*declinamus*] our motions at no fixed time or fixed region of space [*nec tempore certo nec regione loci certa*], but wherever the mind itself carries us? For without doubt it is volition [*voluntas*] that gives these things their beginning for each of us and it is from volition that motions are spread through the limbs (II.251–62; LONG and SEDLEY, 1987, vol. I, pp. 105–6, 20F)

The interpretation of this argument is disputable. The exact relation between *clinamen* and *voluntas* is still widely debatable. Likewise, there is no harmonious reading of the similes Lucretius employs to somehow elucidate his view such as that of the horse running through the gates once they are opened (II.261–71), and of the man who resists an external coercive action (II.272–283). This equivocation bears upon, before all else, the translation of the term “*libera voluntas*.” Should it be rendered *qua* “free will,” as the traditional interpretation defends? Or should it be something more akin to “volitional desire” and “intentional impulse” (cf. O’KEEFE, 2005, p. 42)? Apart from this difficulty in translation, I argue that the conflicting interpretations seem to share a common feature: in a way or another, the *clinamen* introduces a slight discontinuity in a logical/causal chain that would be otherwise fixed; in one way or another, therefore, the *clinamen* implies a certain kind of *break*. This is what the text states explicitly.

Some commentators claim that the *clinamen* intervenes in the formation of the will (Gulley), while others claim that it is rather in the execution of a will which involves effortful activity (Saunders) that the *clinamen* comes into play. Some argue that the *clinamen* is related to the formation of personal character by assuring an interruption with the original constitution of soul-atoms (Furley, Bozien). For Sedley, the swerve brings about “emergent properties” for the self and its volitions which are structurally different than the physical laws of atomic motions. O’Keefe argues that the swerve plays no direct part in the production of any act of will or the formation of character. In his interpretation, the swerve secures the contingency of the future thus denying both logical and causal determinism. Overall, it is a certain space for human agency to step in that is in question in the different readings, via a discontinuance in the nexus of causes.<sup>18</sup>

I will not argue which *species of freedom* Lucretius is interested in retaining by virtue of the swerve. For the purposes of this paper, it does not carry much weight for the argument either to defend that the *libera voluntas* sanctions a full-fledged libertarian conception of freedom of choice – in the form of a freedom to do otherwise or a two-sided potesta-

18 Even in O’Keefe’s “ultra-minimal” interpretation, as he calls it, to oppose it to Bozien’s “minimal” account for the swerve in character-formation, but also to distance it from traditional readings of the swerve in action-theory, we may find a statement such as the following: “Thus, the swerve, by defeating the threat of necessity as posed by Megarian fatalist arguments, provides a necessary condition for other things that matter within Epicurean ethics – *it saves us from the necessity of the physicists*, against which there is no appeal, *it allows us to deliberate and to act efficaciously in the world, which would not be possible if all things happened of necessity*. Beyond playing these specific, though important, functions, the swerve has no impact in Epicurus’ general metaphysics, philosophy of mind, or action -theory” (O’KEEFE, 2005, p.149, my emphasis).

tive understanding of what “depends on us”<sup>19</sup> (παρ’ ἡμᾶς) – or to endorse that it offers us a compatibilist approach of sorts. The important point is that the *clinamen* assures a *break* in the determinist series (logical, causal or both) – the “decrees of fate” [*fati foedera*] –, thus enabling a space for agency that is not the direct output of causes following causes *ad infinitum*.

In the traditional interpretation, the swerve *breaks* the causal overdeterministic chain so that “free will” may take place. In the radical emergence interpretation, the swerve *breaks* the reductionism of psychological volitions to physical motions of the atoms. In the internal cause interpretation, the swerve *breaks* the thoroughly external constitution of the agent’s character. In the bivalence interpretation, the swerve *breaks* with logical/causal determinism that freezes the future in an eternally predetermined image. In any case, the *clinamen* is assumed to break with a *figure of determinism* and to avert the *threat of fatalism*, in an effort to make room for moral accountability, efficacious actions, rational deliberation, and justified praise and blame.<sup>20</sup>

#### SPINOZA: ON *CONATUS*, *LIBERA NECESSITATE* AND NECESSITARIANISM

Before touching on the theme of *conatus*, I believe that it is important to formulate, even if succinctly, some of the theoretical concerns and metaphysical strands driving Spinoza’s enterprise in the *Ethics*, especially on the topic of freedom and necessity, since it is not possible

19 That is, according to Bobzien’s typology (cf. BOBZIEN, 1998; BOBZIEN, 2000).

20 I am using the nomenclature offered by O’Keefe for the different strands of readings in recent literature concerning the swerve (cf. O’KEEFE, 2005, p.18). Each interpretation will emphasize a different issue that the swerve intends to preserve. I am setting them up together just to indicate what is at stake in the argument for the *clinamen*.

to get the right grasp on the doctrine of *conatus* before understanding the broader philosophical framework where it is inscribed. In this regard, I believe that it is in a letter to Schuller that we find Spinoza's strongest version of this account.

The context of his response is a comparison made by Tschirnhaus between Descartes and Spinoza on freedom. In his letter, Tschirnhaus ultimately sided with Descartes and was asking for some clarification on Spinoza's thoughts on freedom. Accordingly, Spinoza's words – echoing Definition 7 from the first book of the *Ethics* –, are:

I say that a thing is free if it exists and acts solely from the necessity of its own nature and compelled if it is determined by something else to exist and produce effects in a fixed and determinate way. E.g., even though God exists necessarily, still he exists freely, because he exists from the necessity of his own nature alone. So God also understands himself and absolutely all things, freely, because it follows solely from the necessity of his nature that he understands all things.<sup>21</sup> You see, then, that I place freedom not in a free decree [*libero decreto*], but in a free necessity [*libera necessitate*]. (SPINOZA, 2016, Letter 58, p.427).

Further in the letter, Spinoza presents a very telling image to explain the workings of that “fictitious human freedom” [*ficta humana libertate*] to which most people are so affectionately bound (cf. SPINOZA, 2016, p.429). The analogy goes as follows: a stone is set in motion by a certain external cause. Even after the immediate stimulus of the external cause ceases, the stone will necessarily continue to move as far as the momentum lasts. This momentum, however, was obtained by the

21 As I intend to show, it is not gratuitous that Spinoza's paradigmatic instance of freedom be God.

*compelled necessity* of an *external cause*, rather than issuing from the *free necessity* of its *essence*, as it is the case with God – the infinite and eternal substance. Conversely, for all finite things, i.e., things “which are all determined by external causes to exist and produce effects in a definite and determinate way” (Spinoza, 2016, p.428) the example of the stone holds as a rule.

Spinoza expands on the analogy of the stone, which will be particularly significant for us since the *conatus* comes into play with this move.

Next, conceive now, if you will, that while the stone continues to move, it thinks and knows that as far as it can it strives [*se, quantum potest, conari*] to continue moving. Of course, since the stone is conscious only of its striving [*conatus*] and not at all indifferent, it will believe that it is very free and that it perseveres in motion for no other cause than because it wills to. This is that famous human freedom everyone brags about having, which consists only in this: that men are conscious of their appetite and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined (SPINOZA, 2016, Letter 58, p.428).

This formula (“men are conscious of their appetite and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined”) will reappear with some slight variations across the *Ethics* to characterize the illusory idea of freedom that Spinoza reproaches (cf. SPINOZA, 1996, I Appendix; II P35S; III P2S; IV Preface).

Furthermore, I think that is not accidental that Spinoza has chosen the image of the stone in motion by an external force to dismiss prevailing conceptions of human freedom. In St. Augustine’s well-known *De Libero Arbitrio*, the downward movement of a stone is employed to highlight the contrast between natural and voluntary movement. Along with his lines, “the stone does not have it in its power to check the

movement by which it is borne in its descent, whereas when the mind does not will, it is not moved to take delight in lower things, leaving higher things behind” (AUGUSTINE, 2010, p.74). The movement of a stone is natural and necessary, whereas the movement of the mind is voluntary and free. The mind can withhold the natural course and that is what renders human beings morally accountable before God. Free will, after all, is a “divine gift” (AUGUSTINE, 2010, p.67). This outlook fits into Augustine’s worldview which maintains that a wandering horse is better than a stone because it has movement of its own and a human being which is endowed with free-will is better than a wandering horse that does not possess this grounding cause of both virtue and sin. (CF. AUGUSTINE, 2010, p.84).<sup>22</sup>

In defiance of this standpoint, Spinoza cannot allow for this hierarchical scale of created beings. This would violate his naturalism, viz. the “thesis that everything in the world plays by the same rules,” as Della Rocca nicely puts it (DELLA ROCCA, 2008, p.5). In Spinoza’s lingo, man in the realm of nature is *not* a “dominion within a dominion” [*imperium in imperio*]; he is not a *divine anomaly* inhabiting God’s natural and necessary world.<sup>23</sup> Instead, human beings are subjected to the same

22 I am aware that this is only a partial and early view of St. Augustine on the matter of freedom, which develops with some important modifications throughout his later works due to a larger focus on the theological conundrums of original sin, divine grace, God’s foreknowledge, predestination, and related topics. For a recent, and cogent survey on St. Augustine and the problem of free will, see COUENHOVEN, 2017.

23 “Most of those who have written about the affects, and men’s way of living, seems to treat, not of natural things, which follow the common laws of Nature, but of things which are outside Nature. Indeed they seem to conceive man in Nature as a dominion within a dominion. For they believe that man disturbs, rather than follows, the order of Nature, that he has absolute power over his actions, and that he is determined only by himself” (SPINOZA, 1996, p.68, III Preface).

“universal laws and rules of nature” (SPINOZA, 1996, p. 69, III Preface) that govern everything that happens, i.e., the necessary and natural concatenation of causes and effects generated by the immanent God.

Looking at the passage just cited in the letter, it appears that the *conatus* doctrine is tied to Spinoza’s criticism against the traditional doctrine of free will. To put it simply, for Spinoza, the belief in the “freedom of the will” amounts to a consciousness of striving [*conatus*] plus ignorance of external causes that triggered the appetite.<sup>24</sup> Alternatively stated, the deep-seated conviction on the *libera voluntas* seems to be bound up with a fundamental cognitive blindness concerning the full compass of the cosmos’ causal series. But let us first unpack these terms to work out their full scope and significance.

The *conatus* argument begins with part III, Proposition 4 “Nothing can be destroyed except through an external cause,” and is fleshed out with proposition 6: “Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being.” [*Unaquaeque res, quantum in se est, in suo esse perseverare conatur*].<sup>25</sup> It is worth noting that this proposition replicates to some extent Descartes’ first law of nature from his *Principia Philosophiae* (DESCARTES, 1982, p. 59, Part II, section XXXVII, ): *quod unaquaeque res, quantum in se est, semper in eodem statu perseveret; sicque quod semel movetur, semper moveri pergit*.<sup>26</sup> In this sense, Edwin Curley, trans-

24 Appetite is nothing more than the striving (*conatus*) when regarded in relation to both mind and body (cf. SPINOZA, 1996, III p9Schol).

25 I am much indebted to Don Garrett’s exposition in his “Spinoza’s Conatus Argument” in my line of reasoning (GARRETT, 2002).

26 In English: “The first law of nature: that each thing, as far as is in its power, always remains in the same state; and that consequently, when it is once moved, it always continues to move.” (DESCARTES, 1982, p.59). In turn, Newton’s Law of Inertia from the

lator and commentator of Spinoza, notes that in addition to the patent Hobbesian ring, the *conatus* argument has a bearing on the technical usage that Descartes made of *conatus* in his physics, closely linked to the principle of inertia that he brought to the fore – more than Galileo and Kepler (cf. COHEN, 1964, p.133) – as the foundation of modern physics (cf. CURLEY, 1998, pp.107-8). That is why Garrett, in his account, will associate *conatus* to what he calls as “existential inertia.”<sup>27</sup>

Spinoza equates in p7 the *conatus* of each thing (its ability to persevere in its being) with the actual essence of the thing [*rei actualem essentiam*] and claims in p8 that thisperseverance involves an indefinite [*indefinitum*], rather than a finite time. Furthermore, in p9s Spinoza will introduce the notorious thesis that we do not strive for something *because* we judge it to be good; on the contrary, our striving for something just *is* the *cause* for it being judged as good. To put it differently, the good is not a *final cause* that lies externally to the finite being that strives to attain it; instead, the striving is the *efficient cause* arising from the actual essence of the finite being that accounts for the fact of it judging something to be good. Indeed, as Spinoza’s contends elsewhere in the *Ethics*: *final causes* are nothing but appetites (or *efficient causes*) mistakenly

*Principia Mathematica* seem do draw directly from Descartes. Besides, the missing link to account for the cryptic phrase “quantum in se est” is probably Lucretius, as Cohen demonstrates in his excellent study (cf. COHEN, 1964). Even though Cohen does not mention Spinoza in the genealogy that he traces, I find that this study is extremely resourceful in expanding our understanding of Spinoza’s *conatus* doctrine.

27 “Furthermore, since a thing cannot exert any power to destroy itself but does (insofar as it is in itself) exert power to preserve itself, each thing (insofar as it is in itself) has some positive tendency—which we might call “existential inertia”—to continue in existence. This existential inertia can be understood partly through the thing’s tendency to preserve itself and partly through its lacking anything in it that could destroy it or oppose this tendency.” (GARRETT, 2002, p.23).



taken as *primary causes* (cf. SPINOZA, 1996, IV Preface). In the light of the adequate knowledge of causality, final causes consist of nothing but a *trompe-l'oeil*, an optical illusion.

At this point, let us briefly recall another set of propositions that sustains the *conatus* doctrine and which are lurking in the background of his explanation. Singular things should be understood as modes by which God's attribute are expressed in a certain and determinate manner (acc. I P25C) and, by the same token, as expressions of God's power (acc. I P34). Likewise, God is the efficient cause both of the essence and of the existence of all singular things (acc. I P24 and P25) and each singular thing has been necessarily determined by the very nature of God to produce an effect (acc. I P26). God is the cause of itself and cannot fail but to necessarily exist and be *in* itself – for there is nothing external to substance in line with I P8. Finite modes, or affections of the divine substance in a determinate state, express God's power by striving to persevere in their being and by becoming – to the degree that they can – a causal focus of their own existence and activity.

Considering this, Garrett's thesis that singular things should be construed as "quasi-substance" (cf. GARRETT, 2002, pp.17; 28-9; 42) is appealing as it explains the *conatus* doctrine while remaining committed to the deep-seated metaphysical underpinnings of Spinoza's work. As such, individual human beings as finite modes should be taken as mere approximations to the conceptual and causal self-sufficiency that God – the self-caused and self-contained substance which always is *in* itself – enjoys. It is only an approximation because the essence of human beings does not encompass the determinate cause or the explanatory reason for their existence. In other terms, the *being* of human beings is not the adequate cause of their essential nature (the 'what it is' question, *essentia*)

and human beings, when taking in consideration solely in themselves, cannot fully explicate the reason for their reality (the ‘that it is’ question, *existentia*). Humans were created by an external cause –since only God is the cause of itself (*causa sui*); otherwise stated: God is the *ratio essendi* and *ratio cognoscendi* of itself and everything else – and humans will certainly perish by an external cause (acc. III P4).

With this in view, the *conatus* can be understood as the ontological foundation of each finite mode that exists in nature. The *conatus* bears the affirmation of each individual essence in the common order of nature *and* it renders explicable all of the properties that issue from its “proper essence”<sup>28</sup> or, differently put, the existence as long as it perseveres in its own being. The striving to persevere in its essence is simultaneously a striving to preserve in its existence against external causes that may destroy it. Since I P24 warns us that “the essence of things produced by God does not involve existence,” once the essence of a finite mode is produced following from the necessity of God’s nature (or *Natura naturata* in line with I P29s), it asserts its power to be and it simply *is* this very striving to persevere in its being. However, this striving should not be read narrowly in the Hobbesian sense as a natural human instinct towards self-preservation, for it also ensures a self-perfecting rule (in step with III P11–P13), an expansion of the mind’s power of thinking and of the body’s power of action that is accompanied by joy.<sup>29</sup>

28 As Garrett puts it, the proper essence comprises “those states or qualities of a thing that are jointly sufficient and severally necessary for the thing’s identity as the particular thing that it is, and which would therefore be specified in an adequate Spinozistic definition of that thing” (GARRETT, 2002, p.5).

29 Curley claims that the passage from self-preservation to the achievement of greater perfection or, what is the same, an augment in power of action coupled with joy, is Spinoza’s ingenious manner of blending Stoic and Epicurean tenets (cf. CURLEY, 1998,

In III P9, Spinoza argues that if the mind has adequate or inadequate ideas, it will nonetheless strive for its own sake to persevere in its being, and that the mind is conscious of its striving. As specified by Spinoza, being conscious of the striving and ignorant of the causes of the striving provides the rationale for the commonly held belief in the “free will.” In the demonstration for this proposition, he explains that the striving, when considered only in relation to the mind, is called Will and when related to the mind as well as the body it is called Appetite.

Spinoza had previously asserted in I P32 that the will [*voluntas*] cannot be called a free cause [*causa libera*], but only a necessary one [*necessaria*], considering that “each volition can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined by another cause and this cause again by another and so on, to infinity” (SPINOZA, 1996, p.21, I P32D). By this moment, I hope that the distinction between the metaphysical apparatuses of Lucretius and Spinoza has become more discernible. While Lucretius infers the existence of the *clinamen* by the presupposition of a *libera voluntas*, Spinoza insists that the *voluntas*, i.e. *conatus* when reflected in the attribute thought, is a *causa necessaria* that is determined to produce an effect by preceding causes *ad infinitum*. This is explained by the fact that in Spinoza’s system only God is a free cause (I D7 with I P17), that is, God alone exists from the necessity of his substantial nature and acts according to it.

That is the reason why I think that Morfino’s althusserian interpretation in favor of a *rapprochement* of Lucretius and Spinoza in terms of *alea* (chance, encounter, randomness) misses the mark entirely.<sup>30</sup> I

pp.114–5).

30 I am referring to his chapter “‘The World by Chance’: On Lucretius and Spino-

cannot grasp how does he come to the conclusion that “the world is by chance” (MORFINO, 2014, p.87) according to both thinkers and that there is a primacy of chance over the necessity in their philosophy after having commented a letter from Spinoza and glossing it along these lines: “Divine causality excludes happenstance and necessity excludes chance.” (MORFINO, 2014, p.79).

So God is a cause of itself and every finite mode that exists is a necessary effect that expresses God’s power, perfection, and reality in a determinate way. As Spinoza writes: “So, all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature, not only to exist, but to exist in a certain way and to produce effects in a certain way. There is nothing contingent.” (I P29) And when Spinoza says “nothing” he *really means* nothing. Both in respect to the past and to the future (cf. II P44CI), everything that *is*, follows both logically and causally from the necessity of the divine eternal nature. This thesis is an articulation of Spinoza’s resolute necessitarian position. In the light of this, it is a defect of knowledge, a misconception of the imagination<sup>31</sup> that makes us consider events as contingent. For reason, as Spinoza famously argues, has the peculiarity of regarding things as necessary and as necessarily true, without connection whatsoever to temporal duration, but rather “under a certain species of eternity”<sup>32</sup> [*sub quadam aeternitatis specie*]. In this

za,” in his book *Plural Temporality: Transindividuality and the Aleatory Between Spinoza and Althusser* (MORFINO, 2014, pp.72–88).

31 “Imagination” in the technical sense that is has in Spinoza: “When the human mind regards external bodies through ideas of the affections of its own body, then we say that it imagines” (SPINOZA, 1996, p.50, II, P26CorD).

32 That is, eternal not because it is everlasting (stretching infinitely to past and future) but because it is timeless, i.e., outside of the temporal structure, just as one might say that the adequate definition of a circle does not pertain to time because it

respect, “imagining a thing as free can be nothing but simply imagining it while we are ignorant of the causes by which it has been determined to act” (SPINOZA, 1996, pp.164–5, v P5D). Considering this, for Spinoza, the *clinamen* should amount to nothing but an inadequate idea, arising from a fallacious reasoning that departs from the affections of the body to reach its conclusion. It would then be a knowledge of the first kind (imagination), rather than of the second (reason) or the third kind (intuitive knowledge), according to the classification offered in II P4OS2.

This discrepancy between both authors is partially explained by the fact that Lucretius makes a distinction between animated and unanimated creatures to advance the thesis of the *clinamen*. It is the possession of *voluntas* or a volitional power that is to a certain extent *libera* or unhindered, in the sense of not being thoroughly determined – causally and logically –, which stipulates that the *clinamen* must take place to fracture the decrees of fate. This form of explanation which institutes a “kingdom within a kingdom” wouldn’t be welcomed by Spinoza. In his reasoning, God, the mind, human action, animals, things, and appetites are treated “just as if it were a question of lines, planes and bodies.” (SPINOZA, 1996, p.69, III Preface), with the same claim of necessary and extratemporal truth that a geometrical definition has. Lucretius’ model in *De Rerum Natura*, on the other hand, is more atomic or physical than mathematical or geometrical.<sup>33</sup>

In connection with this, Spinoza’s “necessitarianism” is a thesis much stronger than determinism, for it holds that the laws of nature

is necessarily true by its own logical definition.

33 For this reason, it has already been argued that Spinoza’s *Ethics* can only be a “descriptive ethics”, and not a “prescriptive ethics.” See RUSSELL, 1984.

and all states of affairs could not have been in any way otherwise.<sup>34</sup> It is precisely this sort of theoretical perspective that Lucretius would want to deny and that made Epicurus propose that it is better to believe in the popular mythology regarding the Gods than to believe in such an inexorable necessary order. But if “all things follow from God’s eternal decree with the same necessity as from the essence of a triangle it follows that its three angles are equal to two right angles” (SPINOZA, 1996, p.68, II P49S), does Spinoza falls prey to the fatalist menace that Epicurus and Lucretius were trying to avert? I suppose that the answer to this would have to be “not necessarily”.

In some respect, it must be conceded that despite Spinoza’s necessitarian metaphysics, human beings engage in goal-directed actions since they cannot grasp in full the logical and causal concatenation that necessarily follows from the nature of God. They deliberate about the future and aspire to achieve external objects, given that they have inadequate knowledge of the “infinite many things in infinite many modes” (SPINOZA, 1996, p.13, I PI6D) that issue from the divine substance.<sup>35</sup> In this sense, they may fail to reach the *reason’s standard of eternity*. Besides, one could argue that this lofty requirement of reason specifies “God’s

34 “The laws of nature are necessary, according to determinism, but the particular series of events governed by these laws is not necessary: there could have been a different series of events. The view that there is more than one possible series of events (or, in Spinozistic terms, one possible series of finite modes) is precisely what determinism allows and necessitarianism denies.” (DELLA ROCCA, 2008, p.75-6). Also, see Garrett, 1991 for a defense of Spinoza’s necessitarianism against readings that try to tone down his commitment to it.

35 For a version of this argument, see Lin, 2006. Also, Garrett, 1990 is a good resource to make sense of the tensions within the *Ethics* between some sort of agency and a full-blown necessitarianism.

point of view” which humans *qua* finite modes should aspire to, but without ever being completely up to the task, as even Spinoza did not consistently abide by it (cf. DELLA ROCCA, 2010).

Furthermore, just as human beings *qua* finite modes should be read as “quasi-substance”, one can defend that they may achieve a “semi-freedom,” i.e., an approximation to the freedom of the divine substance which exists and acts exclusively by the necessity of its nature (cf. I D7). In short, to be self-determined by the necessity of one’s own nature is to be “free” and this means to act in accordance with reason.<sup>36</sup> However, one should bear in mind the important caveat that – by Spinoza’s criterion – only God can be absolutely free, unequivocally self-determined and entirely independent of external causes.<sup>37</sup>

Hence, a human subject can be called “free” only in a limited sense, i.e., insofar as his activity flows – as much as possible – from the necessity of his essence as *conatus* – from within, rather than from outside causes. If the nature of a person is an adequate cause,<sup>38</sup> and a source

36 Spinoza offers us a very important passage that speaks to the relation between reason and *conatus*. I quote it: “Since reason demands nothing contrary to nature, it demands that everyone loves himself, seek his own advantage, what is really useful to him, want what will really lead man to a greater perfection, and absolutely, that everyone should strive to preserve his own being as far as he can [*quantum in se est, conservare conetur*]. This, indeed, is a necessarily true as that the whole is greater than its parts.” (SPINOZA, 1996, p.125, IV P18s).

37 As Garrett explains it, “free man” in Spinoza is an idealized limiting case: “the concept of the free man is the concept of a limit that can be approached but not completely attained by finite human beings.” (GARRETT, 1990, p.231).

38 “I call that cause adequate whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through it. But I call it partial, or inadequate, if its effect cannot be understood through it alone.” (SPINOZA, 1996, p.69, III D1). Causation and conceivability are deeply interwoven in Spinoza’s rationalist philosophy.

of intelligibility of the effects that proceed from him, then this person can be called “free” for he is active in his “actions” under the guidance of reason, instead of being passive in his “re-action,” under the servitude of passions (in accord with III D2 and D3). In this sense, a person may become “free,” virtuous and powerful (cf. IV D8).

The power of passions is a power alien to the *conatus* that defines the singular, actual essence of each subject (cf. IV P5D), compelling it to “react” according to a foreign demand which does not proceed from the laws of its own nature. But the power of reason makes us regard events as necessary and abide by our own *conatus* as the fundamental ground of causality and intelligibility of our activity. In this respect, the *conatus qua* actual essence of human subjects would inevitably dissipate the threat of *apraxia* that the “idle argument” puts forward, as it promotes not only a self-preserving but also a self-perfecting inclination, prompting individuals to increase their power of action. In summary, Spinoza advocates for a *praxis of reason* as the expression of a human, finite freedom against the *pathos of affects* understood as a pathology of servitude.

From his own conceptual resources, then, Spinoza apparently can invalidate the fatalist disposition and refute the “idle argument.” Nonetheless, the differences between his metaphysics and that of Epicurus’/Lucretius’ remains substantial. A balance between the notions of *clinamen* and *conatus* that served as the red thread of our argument is adumbrated in the way of conclusion.



## CONCLUSION

Spinoza seems to have had some acquaintance with Lucretius and the atomistic tradition. In a sequence of letters exchanged with Hugo Boxel over the existence or non-existence of ghosts, specters and the like (SPINOZA, 2016, Letters 51 to 56), Spinoza contrasts the philosophical lineage composed by Plato, Aristotle and Socrates to one formed by Epicurus, Democritus and Lucretius (SPINOZA, 2016, Letter 56, p.423). Against Boxel who was invoking the authority of various ancient philosophers to support the existence of spirits (cf. SPINOZA, 2016, Letter 55, p.420), Spinoza declares that it is not surprising that Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates could have believed in ghostlike entities, as they devised such notions such as “occult qualities,” “intentional species,” “substantial forms” and “a thousand of other trifles”. It would be a matter of wonder, however, if Democritus and the atomists believed in such spectral beings.<sup>39</sup> From this passage, it can be assumed that Spinoza had at least some knowledge about Lucretius and the atomist tradition, to the point of holding them in high regard, higher even than the philosophical holy trinity composed by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

As I hope to have demonstrated with my paper, the metaphysical machinery in operation in Lucretius and Spinoza is so incongruent, that

39 I will quote the entire passage as it is of remarkable interest. “To me the authority of Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates is not worth much. I would have been amazed if you had mentioned Epicurus, Democritus, Lucretius, or any of the Atomists, or defenders of invisible particles. But it’s no wonder that the people who invented occult qualities, intentional species, substantial forms, and a thousand other trifles contrived ghosts and spirits, and believed old wives’ tales, to lessen the authority of Democritus, whose good reputation they so envied that they had all his books burned, which he had published with such great praise.” (SPINOZA, 2016, Letter 56, p.423).

the terms themselves – *clinamen* and *conatus* – come out as discordant. The roles that are assigned to freedom and necessity are sharply contrasted. As a result, the difference between *clinamen* and *conatus* comes about not simply from the conceptual definition of each term, but much more deeply from the sheer distinction between the metaphysical apparatuses that Lucretius and Spinoza put together. To make things clearer, I will collate the conflicting points of each philosophical doctrine below:

(a<sub>1</sub>) *Clinamen*: Occurs in an unidentifiable moment in space and time (DRN II.259-60; 293) taking an atomico-physical pattern of explanation.

(a<sub>2</sub>) *Conatus*: Involves an indefinite time (III P8) which is instantiated by each singular and finite thing, taking the model of a mathematico-geometrical definition.

(b<sub>1</sub>) *Clinamen*: Allow us to be morally accountable (cf. DIOGENES OF OENOANDA; fr. 32, 1.14-3.14).

(b<sub>2</sub>) *Conatus*: Is a source of creation of values (cf. III P9).

(c<sub>1</sub>) *Clinamen*: Presupposes and somehow justifies *libera voluntas*.

(c<sub>2</sub>) *Conatus*: Serves to explain and refute the idea of *libera voluntas*.

(d<sub>1</sub>) *Clinamen*: As a physical phenomenon, breaks with determinism (logical, causal or both) to make room for human agency and rational deliberation.

(d<sub>2</sub>) *Conatus*: As a logical definition and ontological foundation, establishes the necessary cause through which human activity can be, to a certain degree, deemed as “free.”

(e<sub>1</sub>) *Clinamen*: An action is considered to be “free” if it somehow breaks with the rule of fate and does not proceed by necessity from causes after cause *ad infinitum*.

(e<sub>2</sub>) *Conatus*: An action is considered to be “free” if and only if it follows adequately from the necessity of a things’ own nature and is not compelled by external causes (I D8).

With this, I hope to have shown against Deleuze and some contemporary authors that followed his lead, that *clinamen* and *conatus* are almost incommensurable notions and pertain to divergent metaphysical systems. Although I can understand Deleuze’s perspective in devising such an approximation between the two notions as an attempt to defend the *clinamen* against such longstanding refutation, as one finds from Cicero onwards, that considers the *clinamen* to be the manifestation of a motion without a cause, I believe that this conflation is misleading rather than illuminating. Additionally, I hope that by reconsidering some of the problems that Epicurus and Lucretius were facing and by reading them into Spinoza’s philosophy, some fresh light could be drawn on the tensions between human agency and the necessitarian framework from his *Ethics*.

## LUCRETIUS AND SPINOZA OR CLINAMEN AND CONATUS

**ABSTRACT:** This paper compares and contrasts two philosophical concepts that stem from different lineages of thought: on the one hand, Lucretius' *clinamen*; on the other, Spinoza's *conatus*. What has motivated my research for this paper is a conflation between these two notions as suggested by Deleuze in the appendix to his *Logique du sens*. In this regard, the first section is oriented towards an elucidation of Lucretius' philosophy – consequently, of Epicurus' as well –and, specifically, of his view about the swerve of atoms, or *clinamen*, combined with the subject of freedom. The second section is dedicated to clarifying Spinoza's metaphysics and the accommodation of the theme of freedom within his robust necessitarian framework, interwoven with the motif of *conatus*, or self-preserving striving. Against Deleuze's reading, however, I argue that *clinamen* and *conatus* belong to metaphysical systems that are quite incompatible and that they support different understandings of both freedom and necessity.

**KEY-WORDS:** Lucretius, Spinoza, clinamen, conatus, freedom, necessity.

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